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SUBJECT: GOI WILLING TO DISCUSS PACKAGE APPROACH TO
RESOLVING KARNI CLOSURE

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Brig. General Baruch Spiegel expressed interest in a proposal to resolve the humanitarian crisis caused by the closure of Karni that would open Kerem Shalom to humanitarian shipments from both Israel and Egypt to Gaza and improve security at the crossings. The Ambassador plans to host a meeting on March 19 with GOI, PA, Egyptian, and EU-BAM officials to discuss the plan. Spiegel predicted that GOI policy on whether to continue to allow Gazan workers to enter Israel would be set after the upcoming Knesset elections. He also reported that construction on the separation barrier continues as does the building of a new highway on the West Bank that would allow Palestinians to travel point to point from Ramallah to Bethlehem without obstacles. End summary.

Meeting to Resolve Karni Crisis

12. (C) During a meeting with the Ambassador on March 17, Brig. General (Res.) Baruch Spiegel expressed interest in a proposal to ameliorate the humanitarian impact on Gaza of the continued closure of Karni crossing due to terrorist threats. This approach includes opening Kerem Shalom for humanitarian shipments from Israel and Egypt to Gaza, using Erez as a back-up to Karni, and improving the security of the crossings against potential terrorist attacks. The Ambassador offered to host a meeting at his Residence on March 19 with Israeli, PA, Egyptian, and EU-BAM officials to discuss this plan. Spiegel said that prior to opening Kerem Shalom for the passage of goods between Egypt and Gaza, GOI and Egyptian officials need to discuss procedures and security issues. He said the Egyptians did not want to proceed without GOI-PA agreement on Kerem Shalom. He added that while the EU-BAM is not involved in humanitarian crossings, it would be important to include them to aid in confidence building between the parties. Spiegel asked the U.S. to encourage PA and Egyptian participation in the meeting.

Policy on Entry of Palestinian Workers

13. (C) Spiegel said on March 18 the GOI will re-assess the security situation and decide whether to lift the current closures on Gaza and the West Bank on Sunday, March 19. He said construction is continuing on the Erez terminal, which will have capacity for 15,000-20,000 Gazan workers with permits to enter Israel. Spiegel predicted that a final GOI policy on whether to maintain the Erez Industrial Zone and permit entry of Gazan workers will be set following the March 28 Knesset elections. The Ambassador reminded Spiegel that it is essential to maintain economic activity in the West Bank and Gaza and avoid humanitarian suffering. He noted that those who are gainfully employed are less likely to be involved in terrorist activity.

Separation Barrier and Movement

14. (C) Spiegel said the GOI is building a highway between Ramallah and Bethlehem that would allow Palestinians to travel from point to point without stopping (although it would have exits) and avoid all contact with Israelis. He noted that construction has been delayed in some places while the GOI awaits High Court decisions regarding the separation barrier. Spiegel said that despite numerous appeals in the High Court, the GOI is making rapid progress in the construction of the planned 769-kilometer barrier, especially in the southern part from near Hebron to the Dead Sea. He said that 310 kilometers have already been completed. The fence is under MOD administration, said Spiegel, but the construction subcontractors work independently. Spiegel said that when the separation barrier is completed, most of the present checkpoints in the West Bank can be removed.

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JONES